

The Dark Side of Political Ecology

By Peter Zegers

“[I]f the word *ecology* is used to describe our outlook, it is preposterous to invoke deities, mystical forces to account for the evolution of first nature into second nature. Neither religion nor a spiritualistic vision of experience has any place in an ecological lexicon. Either the term *ecology* applies to natural phenomena *by definition*, or it is a chic metaphor for the disempowered consciousness that fosters mysticism or outright supernaturalism.”
[Murray Bookchin, *The Ecology of Freedom: The Emergence and Dissolution of Hierarchy*. (Montréal: Black Rose, Second edition 1991) p. xxi]

The ecology movement has over the last decades been a battleground for both progressive and reactionary ideas. The notions one encounters in the ecology movements range from genuinely progressive and humanist ones to extremely misanthropic, even ecofascistic ones. In the essay “Will ecology become ‘the dismal science?’” American social ecologist Murray Bookchin identified nearly ten years ago some of the anti-humanistic tendencies within the ecology movement in the United States: deep ecology, biocentrism, Gaian consciousness, and eco-theology. Basic to these outlooks is a suspicion of reason and an emphasis on the importance of intuitive and irrational approaches to ecological issues. Bookchin concluded the essay with this note: “It is not only the great mass of people that must make hard choices about humanity’s future in a period of growing ecological dislocation; it is the ecology movement itself that must make hard choices about its sense of direction in a time of growing mystification.” (1) Since Bookchin’s essay was published in 1991, these anti-humanistic tendencies have unfortunately become even more prominent. A case in point is one of the leading American deep ecologists, Bill Devall. Together with George Sessions, Bill Devall introduced the ideas of Arne Næss, the founder of deep ecology, to the American public. Devall uttered on August 2, 1998, at the conference *Gold and Green*, a racist remark against Mexican immigrants: according to him, they “did what gangs of Mexicans always do – rape, pillage, burn, murder.” He also made the point that the owner of Maxxam Corporation (a firm threatening a redwood forest in California) was “a criminal Jewish capitalist.” Devall’s associate George Sessions, also present at this conference, lamented about the left wing perspective of a lot

of people in the ecology movement and claimed that social justice issues only would distract attention from the real cause of the ecological crisis: overpopulation. In order to counteract the ecological imbalance Sessions suggested that an authoritarian regime should be implemented, like the one that ruled Japan from 1615 to 1836. (2) Is this just a marginal incident? Because of the premises on which deep ecology is predicated I very much doubt this.

The Political Implications of Deep Ecology

Deep ecology is a vague and formless concept and one can find all kinds of mixtures of reactionary and seemingly progressive ideas in it. Deep ecologists claim very different thinkers as pioneers of deep ecology; one can for example find Heidegger alongside Spinoza. No effort is made to explain how these very different thinkers can be rubricated in the same category. Commenting on this lack of coherence Arne Næss wrote: “Why *Gleichschaltung*? Why monolithic ideologies? We have had enough of those in both European and world history.” (3) To put a demand for coherence on a par with a Nazi operation is telling enough and reveals his limited understanding of fascism. Næss continues in the same article: “It would, in my view, be a cultural disaster for humankind if one philosophy or one religion were to become established on earth. It would be a disaster if future Green societies were so similar that they blocked the development of deep cultural differences.” (4) Does this also apply to human rights and democracy? In another interview he stated: “Diversity in every aspect of our existence should be a norm, whether it is biodiversity, cultural diversity or economic diversity. Diversity of ideas is also very important. If we thought that there is one correct idea, one absolute truth, one right way to sustainability, then we might end up creating a kind of eco-fascism. It is only through multiplicity, plurality, diversity and inclusivity that we can find self-realization. There is no one final definition of self-realization. Everyone will find their own meaning in this word. Through deep questioning we come to deep ecology and through deep ecology we come to self-realization, but all this means nothing. It remains a kind of theory. It is through practice that we find realization. As each one of us has our own body, we have our own ‘realization’.” (5) Maybe because of this limited understanding of eco-fascism Næss does not mind being published by extreme right wing publications in France and Italy. Indeed his ideas bear a close resemblance to the ‘ethno-pluralism’ advocated by Alain de Benoist and others in the *Nouvelle Droite*. American author Kirkpatrick Sale,

who is very close to deep ecology, is very clear about the fact that democracy and human rights need not be respected, but that we instead should respect the denial of democracy and human rights! Kirkpatrick Sale wrote: “[Bioregional diversity] does not mean that every community in a bioregion, every subregion within an ecoregion, every ecoregion on a continent, would construct itself along the same lines, evolve the same political forms. Most particularly it does not mean that every bioregion would be likely to heed the values of democracy, equality, liberty, freedom, justice and the like, the sort that the liberal American tradition proclaims. Truly autonomous bioregions would inevitably go in separate and not necessarily complementary ways, creating their own political systems according to their own environmental settings and their own ecological needs ... Different cultures could be expected to have quite different views about what political forms could best accomplish their bioregional goals, and (especially as we imagine this system on a global scale) those forms could be at quite some variance from the Western Enlightenment-inspired ideal. And however much one might find the thought unpleasant, that divergence must be expected and – if diversity is desirable – respected.” (6)

Not only does deep ecology oppose the universal concepts of democracy and human rights through its misguided understanding of diversity, the ideas of Næss verge also on the mystical and he himself seems to be aware of this since he quotes New Age-author Charlene Spretnak approvingly when she calls for 'emotional involvement and caring' *instead* of rational thinking. (7) It is therefore not very surprising that New Age-authors Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak have embraced the label deep ecology. Fritjof Capra is like Spretnak very outspoken in his anti-rationalism: “Ultimately, deep ecological awareness is spiritual or religious awareness.” (8) Charlene Spretnak declares humanism to be the principal enemy of an ecological politics. In 1984 she said in an address to the annual gathering of the E.F. Schumacher Society: “Green politics rejects the anthropocentric orientation of humanism, a philosophy which posits that humans have the ability to confront and solve the many problems we face by applying human reason and by rearranging the natural world and the interactions of men and women so that human life will prosper.” (9) Spretnak and Capra wrote a book about the German Greens where they, in spite of the 'pluralism' of deep ecology, made very clear that they are hostile to left wing tendencies in the Green movement. (10) Unfortunately no such demarcation exists for right wing tendencies in the ecology movement. The Right seems to be very grateful to enter this lack of demarcation and it would indeed be very hard to demarcate deep ecology

from the Right because it shows structural similarities with Right ideology. Although Capra and Spretnak seem to be aware of the German past, they have trouble seeing the continuity with the present. They describe Herbert Gruhl as a 'conservative' politician, whereas the term eco-fascist would be more appropriate. Gruhl was one of the founders of *Die Grünen* but left the party in 1982 (which Capra and Spretnak seem to regret and blame the 'marxists' for) to found the *Ökologisch Demokratische Partei* (Ecological Democratic Party). When this party decided in 1989 to distance itself from the extreme Right political party *Die Republikaner* against the will of Gruhl, he withdrew and founded the *Unabhängige Ökologen Deutschlands*. He was one of the first to use ecological discourse for xenophobic purposes. (11) Capra and Spretnak also do not seem to understand why many Germans are so suspicious about ideas that bear a close resemblance to the *Blut und Boden* (Blood and soil) theories of the Nazis. Instead of analyzing this resemblance and continuity, they choose to ignore it and as a consequence they were uncritical of Rudolf Bahro's views that only a few years later culminated into a kind of spiritual fascism. (12)

Deep ecology is a very eclectic bag of ideas and there are yet other features that are very disturbing because of the reactionary implications. Fundamental for deep ecology is the completely unfounded assertion that the ecological crisis is caused by 'overpopulation'. There is not a single line in the vast literature on deep ecology that explains why this would be the case. It is simply a matter of faith for adherents of deep ecology and because of this, critique of this aspect has not resulted in a change of ideas in this matter. (13) Some of the supporters of deep ecology have publicly stated that AIDS and famines are nature's revenge on humankind and that we should not do anything about it. A case in point is Dave Foreman, an activist of the environmental direct action group *Earth First!*, who said in an interview to Bill Devall: "When I tell people how the worst we could do in Ethiopia is to give aid – the best thing would be to just let nature seek its own balance, to let the people there just starve – they think that is monstrous. But the alternative is that you go in and save these half-dead children who never will live a whole life. Their development will be stunted. And what is going to happen in ten years' time is that twice as many people will suffer and die. Likewise, letting the USA be an overflow valve for problems in Latin America is not solving a thing. It is just putting more pressure on resources we have in the USA. It is just causing more destruction of our wilderness, more poisoning of water and air, and it is not helping the problems in Latin America." (14) Not a single protest against this raving was uttered by Devall, one of the leading exponents of

deep ecology in the United States. We understand from his statements at the *Gold and Green* conference quoted above why Bill Devall did not bother to contradict Foreman. Deep ecology lacks a theory of the *social* causes of the environmental crisis and the only solution they can think of is a reduction of population. How to achieve this is not made clear, but some supporters do not exclude draconic, indeed eco-fascistic measures.

The anti-humanist notion of 'biocentrism', the notion that all living beings have equal 'intrinsic worth', is another disturbing feature in deep ecology. This 'biocentrism' has its counterpart in 'anthropocentrism', the view that human happiness and welfare should precede all other priorities. In the book *The Arrogance of Humanism* (1981) David Ehrenfeldt wrote in this 'biocentric' vein about the right of the smallpox-virus to exist. Since then tons of paper have been produced with articles about 'intrinsic worth', 'biocentric democracy', and 'biocentrism' and its implications. Indeed deep ecology has become a booming academic industry. The way seems to be opened for the discussion of *how much* human suffering and death is acceptable in the name of an 'ecological ethics'. Again, there is not the faintest idea about the *social* roots of the environmental problems. All people, regardless of their position in society, are held equally responsible for the destruction of the environment in this view. Humanity's 'original sin' was 'anthropocentrism' (theological words apply very neatly in this way of thinking). Deep ecologists have a very static view on nature or 'wilderness'. As important as they profess to value 'wilderness', they never explain very much the meaning of this concept. For them 'nature' is just a scenic view, untouched by human intervention even though in reality there is no 'wilderness' left on this earth. Nevertheless some deep ecologists want to exclude people from some areas, at least people not living 'traditional' (pre-1500 A.D., according to Foreman) lifestyles. (15) Hand in hand with their reverence for 'wild' nature goes a depreciation of science and technology. These are held responsible for the desacralization of nature and consequently the destruction of the environment. Bill Devall, in his usual subtle way, states it like this: "Students in natural resources sciences and management – are much like the guards in Nazi death camps." (16) In another passage he makes the same comparison: "I see an analogy between rescuers of Jews and homosexuals in Nazi-occupied Europe and strategic monkeywrenching (a tactic used by the environmental direct action group *Earth First!*, PZ) in the late twentieth century." (17) Like Næss, Devall has no hesitations about using inappropriate analogies that trivialize the Holocaust.

The Extreme Right and Ecology

Even more disturbing than the reactionary implications of basic tenets of deep ecology is the use of ecological concepts by groups and individuals of the extreme Right. Many people in the ecology movement consider themselves to be 'beyond Left and Right', but this position unfortunately makes them very vulnerable to overtures from the extreme Right, which (especially in Europe) is trying to modernize its rhetoric (the slogan was, tellingly enough, invented by the German right wing ecologist Herbert Gruhl for *Die Grünen*). By adopting ecological themes and concepts and incorporating them into its propaganda, the extreme Right today is seeking to gain mainstream public acceptance. For example, in France the *Nouvelle Droite* (New Right) has shown a lot of interest in deep ecology. *Nouvelle Droite* is the name for a tendency in the extreme right wing milieu that tries to modernize its ideology. A central organisation in this field is the *Groupe ment de Recherche et d'Études pour la Civilisation Européenne*, founded in 1968. Its leading ideologue is Alain de Benoist, who is constantly changing his ideas, but nonetheless always opposed the egalitarian ideas that originated in the Enlightenment. (18) It is far beyond the scope of this article to explain in any detail the history of GRECE. (19) Suffice it for now to say that De Benoist and his supporters became interested in ecology around 1993. In an article about the *European New Right* (ENR) Mark Wegierski wrote: "Although some ENR members at one time advocated technocracy, they have now embraced *ecology* as one of the most hopeful tendencies on the planet today. The 1993 GRECE colloquium was dedicated to ecology." (20) From the milieu around GRECE a new ecological organization was founded in the early nineties. This organization called *Nouvelle Écologie* (New Ecology) organizes conferences and lectures and publishes the magazine *Le recours aux forêts*. *Nouvelle Écologie* regards itself as the French branch of the international deep ecology movement and tries to influence the ecology movement toward a right wing direction.

Even as the extreme Right has picked up and incorporated ecological themes, some prominent ecologists have themselves evolved toward reactionary positions and do not mind to work together very closely with the extreme Right. The British ecologist Edward Goldsmith is a case in point. Goldsmith has been a well-known figure in the international environmentalist movement for several decades. In 1970 he founded the journal *The Ecologist*, which has long been a leading voice for the movement. He was one of the

authors of the 1972 bestseller *A Blueprint for Survival*. Already in this book some conservative views were exhibited: “If there is no hierarchy there will be constant bickering and fighting. There will also be no mechanism for ensuring the perpetuation of those qualities required if the society is to survive.” (21) The overall obsession in *Blueprint* is 'stability' and 'order'. According to the authors of *Blueprint* the causes of the environmental crisis are to be found in economic and demographic growth. Like the authors of the *Limits to Growth* report of the conservative Club of Rome, whom they regard as like-minded individuals, their view on the environmental crisis is extremely limited. In 1991 he received the *Right Livelihood Award*, the 'alternative Nobel prize'. He is presently very much involved with international campaigns against the WTO, MAI, nuclear energy, and genetically modified organisms. For years, Goldsmith had also been known for his socially paleo-conservative views, especially on the role of women and the family. In an interview he said: “In my view women perform a very important role, both with regard to social coherence as well as of the viewpoint of the protection of the environment. They do not have the typical male chauvinism and competitiveness. I am in favour of the kind of feminism Vandana Shiva stands for, whom I know very well by the way, but which is completely at odds with the American kind of feminism that in the end results only in a reversal of male chauvinism into female chauvinism. You know, one has to accept the differences between men and women, just like those of ethnic groups and cultures. For me, as well as for Shiva, cultural, ethnic, and also biological diversity, destroyed by the global economy, are very important.” (22) In *The Way: An Ecological World-View* (1992, revised and enlarged edition 1998) Goldsmith tries to formulate his worldview. Like Fritjof Capra he bases his views on an unlikely mix of mechanistic systems theory and eastern mysticism. Many of Goldsmiths ideas focus on religion and its alleged role in shaping the social order. Western society went wrong, he asserts, when it embraced technology, science, and progress instead of the traditional 'Way' (or Tao). The monotheistic religions are also to blame for the desacralization of nature. Goldsmith thinks society should be reorganized so that it accords with the precepts of 'Gaia' which means arranged in the same plan and governed by the same laws as the Cosmos and the natural world. Religion is the means through which the laws of nature should be instrumentalized in society. Goldsmith puts it himself this way: “The argument put forward in this book is that we can only conceivably do better if, among other things, we set out to re-interpret our problems in the light of a very different world-view – the worldview of ecology – inspired as it must be by the chthonic world-view entertained by our remote ancestors who

knew, as modern man no longer knows, how to live on this planet.” (23) He sees potential in the religious fundamentalist movements in the Moslem world and India. He states: “[t]here are signs ... that such movements are likely to preach a return to the vernacular way of life ...[A] considerable proportion of the revivalist movements that have so far sprung up in the Third World have been 'nativistic' – which is to say that they correctly attributed the ills against they were reacting to the way of life imposed upon them by their colonial masters, and preached a return to the Way of their ancestors ... We cannot afford to wait and see whether such movements will develop into revivalist cults that are powerful enough to transform our society. Instead, we should work towards their development by helping to create the conditions in which they are likely to emerge. Let us remember that the world-view of ecology is very much that of the vernacular community-based society.” (24) Interestingly, he refers a few times very favourably to deep ecology in his book *The Way: An Ecological World-View*, which he hopes will develop into a movement to perform the task put forward in the book. Goldsmith thanks deep ecology founder Arne Næss, “who, after reading a summary of this book in *The Ecologist*, urged me to complete it and get it published.” (25) The view that people should obey the laws of nature (or Gaia) can be found in deep ecology, but also in New Age and the *Nouvelle Droite*.

The views of Goldsmith are also a potential justification for racism. Nicholas Hildyard, a former associate of Goldsmith, wrote a critique of his views and showed convincingly that he is in favor of separation of different so called 'ethnic groups'. (26) In an article for *The Ecologist* Goldsmith wrote: “The Catholics and the Protestants in Northern Ireland constitute two distinct ethnic groups, of different origin, with different manners and traditions and different motivations and capacities. They could occupy the same geographic area and form a single society if they were capable of living in cultural symbiosis with each other, which they have done up to now. The Catholics, however, are no longer willing to fill the lower echelons of the economic hierarchy, as the cultural pattern which previously enabled them to do so has largely broken down. The only remaining solution is to separate them territorially. Ataturk separated Greeks and Turks very successfully, although there was a terrible outcry at the time and it undoubtedly caused considerable inconvenience to the people who were forced to migrate. But should we not be willing to accept measures of inconvenience in order to establish a stable society?” (27) Few people would agree with his rather peculiar view that Irish Catholics

and Protestants are two distinct ethnic groups. In his book *The Way* he adds more in general: “Social evolution has led to the development of complex social groupings and to a wide diversity of different ethnic groups, each perfectly adapted to the specialized environment in which it lives.” (28) This view accords perfectly with *Nouvelle Droite* views on ethnicity, which is also in favour of territorial separation of different 'ethnic' groups. In the 1990s he therefore has become very attractive to the *Nouvelle Droite*.

The popularity of Goldsmith's writings among the *Nouvelle Droite* has made him welcome at *Nouvelle Droite* conferences. On 27 November 1994 he was one of the featured speakers for the 25th annual conference of GRECE, the major *Nouvelle Droite* organization in France. Its theme was (very tellingly) “Left-Right: the end of a system.” He also gave an interview to their magazine *Elements* in October 1996. Goldsmith was also a welcome guest at the conference of the Flemish connection of *Nouvelle Droite* in Belgium. On 11 November 1997 he was a speaker on the third colloquium of the *Delta Stichting*, the Belgian connection of GRECE, about How can we survive decadence? His speech was called *Against progress: the U-turn we need*. Another speaker at this conference was Alain de Benoist, with whom Goldsmith obviously does not mind sharing a platform. Goldsmith has also contributed his writings to *Nouvelle Droite* publications, such as the Flemish *Tekos*. This magazine is published by the *Delta Foundation*, which has a lot of contacts with the extreme Right *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Bloc). Guy de Martelaere, collaborator of *Tekos*, found translating Goldsmith's writings to be an uplifting experience: “The Tekos-colloquium in Antwerp on 11 November was a big success. The conservative-ecological theses of Edward Goldsmith have attracted a lot of interest and acceptance from *Nouvelle Droite* audiences, which partly have yet to discover green thought. Alain de Benoist, internationally the leading ideologue of the *Nouvelle Droite*, and Luc Pauwels, chief editor of the Belgian periodical *Tekos*, are moving into an ecological direction, inspired among other things by contact with Goldsmith and his ideas. I myself got the task to translate one of Goldsmith's most recent and philosophically profound articles for *Tekos*.” (29)

In recent years, Goldsmith has also been an active supporter of *Nouvelle Écologie* in France. Laurent Ozon, a disciple of Alain de Benoist, is the director of this organization. Laurent Ozon wrote in an article about housing: “For ecologists it is today essential to safeguard for every people its creative local expression, its possibility even to live or to

exist as a constructive part of a culture that participates in the diversity of life. Because the uprooting caused by the individualization of style and the globalization of construction standards is an important weapon in the war waged by the forces of money, hate, and standardization against the natural communities and their ecosystems.” (30) The writings of Goldsmith are an important source of inspiration for Ozon. Besides being the director of *Nouvelle Écologie*, Ozon has very active against the war of NATO in Kosovo as the leading figure in the *Collectif Non à la Guerre*, which tried to build an alliance between Left and Right in opposition to the the intervention of NATO in Kosovo. *Nouvelle Écologie* also has the support of Antoine Waechter, the leading exponent of the 'neither Left nor Right' faction within the green movement in France, the so-called 'ninis'. On May 29, 1989, Waechter declared on French public television: “To open the borders for foreigners is a dangerous utopia. Bearing in mind the demographic explosion in the Third World, there would be millions of people wandering to an already overpopulated Europe. The damage on the cultural and environmental level would be devastating.” (31) How would the *Nouvelle Droite* not be interested in such an ecologist? In September 1993 *Krisis*, the journal edited by Alain de Benoist, asked for and got an interview from him. In this interview Waechter said: “[I]f there is a place today for an autonomous ecological movement, it is precisely because political ecology is accompanied by a philosophy of action completely different than that supported by the Right-Left cleavage, that structured the French political landscape for two centuries and shows today clear signs of exhaustion.” (32) Waechter broke away from *Les Verts* in 1994 because he thought they were too much leaning toward the Left and he founded the political party *Mouvement Écologiste Indépendant* (Independent Ecology Movement). The new party received the full support of *Nouvelle Écologie* and its whereabouts got plenty of coverage in *Le recours aux forêts* (the title of this magazine is a reference to an article by the German extreme right wing author Ernst Jünger that was translated to French and published in *Krisis* in 1993). Waechter has made several electoral alliances with the autonomists in Alsace. The autonomist party in Alsace (like in Brittany) has a long history in right wing politics. In an interview in *Alsace Presse* in December 1998 Waechter explained his differences with *Les Verts*, and its candidate Daniel Cohn-Bendit. Waechter said: “Our list is truly ecological, whereas that of Daniel Cohn-Bendit is a list of the Left with an ecological coloration. Our aim is to make sure that the list of *Les Verts* does not accumulate the votes of distracted voters, that is the votes of the Leftists and the votes of those with an ecological sensibility that could be seduced by the centrist discourse of Cohn-Bendit.” (33) In a letter to the

daily *Libération* Waechter protested against the accusation of working together closely with extreme Rightists on a conference in Paris in January 1999: “What are they reproaching me for? To have participated in a forum and presenting a lecture about Robert Hainard. Is there a single idea in my lecture that resembles closely or distantly the theses of the extreme Right? No, for sure. Is there a single word from the moderator, Laurent Ozon, that would justify such a connection? Not any more so. Burt Laurent Ozon has had the courage to ask some iconoclast questions and to gather some intellectuals of different persuasions to answer them. This is disturbing because this enterprise is situated outside of the convenient cleavage. Just like an ecological list is disturbing because it destroys the myth according to which the ecologists are represented at the European elections by *Les Verts*. Why can not the Left and the Right deal with the emergence of political ideas that are different from socialism and liberalism?” (34)

Edward Goldsmith was, like Antoine Waechter, one of the featured speakers in this conference in Paris which had as its theme: *Ecology against progress?* It was organized by *Nouvelle Écologie* and Goldsmith presented his usual paleo-conservative views on *Family, Community, Democracy*. Of course Alain de Benoist and several other people of the *Nouvelle Droite* were also present. A report of this conference was published in *Le recours aux forêts*, the magazine of *Nouvelle Écologie*, which earlier devoted a special issue to the views of Edward Goldsmith. In the interview in this special issue of *Le recours aux forêts* on his views, Goldsmith said: “In both France and England, as well as in Germany, the Greens have the tendency to align themselves with the Left, because the Left is thought of as being less linked to the big multinational corporations, and therefore more inclined to protect the interests of the people. But, in my view, this will change, because of the simple reason that there practically no difference anymore between the Left and the Right, neither in France nor in Germany and the United States ... It goes without saying that it is a question of time before a party will be created to represent all these groups that are marginalized by the global economy and also of those who want to preserve what is left of our society, of its culture, and its natural environment. The next political cleavage will be the one between the parties in favour of the global economy and those in favour of the local and communitarian economy. Of course I hope the ecologists will play an important role in the formation of this party that could be a federation of parties.” (35)

In advance of the European elections of May 1999, Goldsmith tried to put his ideas into practice and he wanted to form an electoral alliance with Waechter's MEI. But in February 1999 the right wing affiliations of both Edward Goldsmith and Antoine Waechter were exposed, whereupon the alliance was broken up. (36) Fortunately Waechter's MEI did not get many votes in the subsequent election. In September 1999 Goldsmith wrote a letter to the magazine *Silence* in which he defended his attendance at the conference of GRECE in 1994 by stating that he also spoke at a conference organized by the trotskyist party in Switzerland. He says he never checks the organizations who invite him to speak at their conferences. He states that he does not know about the current political views of GRECE (although he admits that it was founded from an extreme Rightist background) and he defends Alain de Benoist by saying that the Frenchman is critical of the views on immigration of the *Front National*. Indeed, De Benoist is critical of *Front National*, but that does not mean he is not part of the extreme right wing. It seems to escape Goldsmith that not every criticism of the *Front National* is necessarily progressive. De Benoist is in disagreement with the strategy used by *Front National*, not its principles. Goldsmith also denied that he was involved with financing the MEI campaign for the European elections but Antoine Waechter said otherwise in a press statement issued by the MEI dated 7 December 1998. Very revealing Goldsmith writes at the end of this letter: "It may be worthwhile to mention that all my African, Hindu and Polynesian friends (*except those who were too much exposed to Western influences*) agree on the principles of this worldview." (37) Makes one wonder where these friends stand in the political spectrum. Goldsmith seems to believe in some kind of cultural apartheid and that different cultures should not influence one another.

Alain de Benoist said of Goldsmith in an interview: "I am ... in sympathy with the views expressed by ... Edward Goldsmith, in such works as *The great U-turn* (1988), *The Way: an Ecological Worldview* (1991) and again, very recently, in a collection of pieces entitled *The Case against the Global Economy and for a Turn toward the Local* (Sierra Club Books, San Francisco 1996)." (38) Goldsmith's book was translated into French as *Le défi du XXI^e siècle - Une vision écologique du monde*. His book is very well received by the connections of the *Nouvelle Droite* in Germany and Italy as well. *The Way* was translated to German and Heinz-Siegfried Strelow, one of the leading exponents of the *Unabhängigen Ökologen Deutschlands* (Independent Ecologists of Germany) wrote that it should become obligatory reading for conservative ecologists (which is nothing but a

euphemism for ecofascists). (39) In Italy *The Way* was published as *Il Tao dell'Ecologia* and Goldsmith also contributed an article to the right wing magazine *Diorama Letterario* under the same title. (40) This magazine is the Italian connection of GRECE and headed by Marco Tarchi, a political scientist working at the University of Florence. Goldsmith went to Florence on 17 February 1999 to speak about *Community, Local Economies, and Globalization*. He did not mind sharing a platform with Marco Tarchi on this occasion. Tarchi is a well-known supporter of GRECE, a former member of the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* and nowadays very close to the separatist *Lega Nord*. He professes an interest in the deep ecology of Arne Næss. (41) In a review of Robyn Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Eco-centric Approach* for the British far Right magazine *The Scorpion* the known neo-nazi Michael Walker wrote: “[I]t is precisely deep ecology and bio-regionalism that are most likely to inspire a conservative or anti-liberal, even anti-humanist, dare we say even racist, green perspective. There is no lack of dire warnings from the Left about the dangers for the uninitiated of bio-regionalism, which by its very name invites the novice to consider the biological implications of the conservation of differences. Deep ecology is so radical in its anti-capitalism that anti-capitalism is more important than anti-fascism and saving the world more important than either, more important than anything else in fact.” (42) Fortunately so far there have been no signs of the far Right making serious overtures to the ecology movement in Britain, but judging from this assessment of Michael Walker, the ecology movement should be very vigilant.

The Challenge for the Ecology Movement

There is a very real danger that the right wing will significantly influence the ideology and practice of the ecology movement. The *Nouvelle Droite* will gladly take the opportunity to use the similarities in thinking of the anti-humanist and anti-rationalist currents in the ecology movement. In this they have the full support of Edward Goldsmith. The ecology movement once was a very promising movement, but unfortunately the promise of a new kind of politics was never fulfilled. Instead it drifted into mysticism and religion on the one hand and to an uncritical acceptance of the status quo on the other hand (cfr. *Les Verts* in France, *Die Grünen* in Germany, *Agalev* and *Ecolo* in Belgium, *I Verdi* in Italy). The current rise of mysticism, religion, and obscurantism in Europe and North America will be regarded by the right wing as a gigantic opportunity to spread their message. In spite of

the statement by the neo-nazi Michael Walker about the anti-capitalist nature of deep ecology, capitalism has nothing to fear from mystical ecology. The *social* causes of environmental degradation are 'deeply' mystified by the acolytes of deep ecology, bioregionalism and ecofeminism. It is more likely that these tendencies will result in authoritarian measures against the poor and weak in society. As an antidote to this kind of thinking American social ecologists Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier wrote: "What prevents ecological politics from yielding reaction or fascism is an ecology movement that maintains a broad social emphasis, one that places the ecological crisis in a social context." (43) Rather than in a context of race, ethnicity, bioregion, mysticism, and the like, ecological politics should be embedded in the struggle against hierarchical domination and class exploitation, the fundamental *social* causes of environmental problems.

Ecology, if unmediated by social theory and philosophy, can easily result in terrible disasters. Context is all-important, as Murray Bookchin points out correctly: "To think ecologically is to enter the domain of nature philosophy. This can be a very perilous step. Serious political ambiguities persist in nature philosophy itself: namely its potential to nourish reaction as well as revolution. Contemporary society is still seared by images of nature that have fostered highly reactionary political views. Vaporous slogans about 'community' and humanity's 'oneness with nature' easily interplay with the legacy of 'naturalistic' nationalism that reached its genocidal apogee in Nazism, with its myths of race and 'blood and soil'. *It requires only a minor ideological shift from the ideas of the nineteenth-century Romantic movement and William Blake's mystical anarchism to arrive at Richard Wagner's mystical nationalism.*" (44) With the goal of creating a rational, humanist, and truly democratic society, *social ecology* stands out as the complete opposite of the current anti-humanist, irrationalist, and authoritarian trends in the ecology movement and in society at large. We have to make hard choices and think critically and rationally about these choices. We face a grim future if the battle against the reactionary trends is not won.

Notes

1. Murray Bookchin, “Will Ecology become ‘the Dismal Science’?” in *The Progressive* (1991). Reprinted in *Which Way for the Ecology Movement?* (Edinburgh & San Francisco: AK Press, 1994).
2. Quoted in David Kubrin, “Toxic Ideologies” in *Reclaiming Quarterly*, Summer 1999.
3. Arne Næss, “Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises” in *The Ecologist*, Vol. 18, Nos. 4/5 (1988). Reprinted in *Society and Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1992), p. 108.
4. idem, p. 113.
5. Interview with Arne Næss and Helena Norberg-Hodge in *Resurgence*, January 1997.
6. Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1991), p. 108.
7. Arne Næss, “Deep Ecology and Ultimate Premises” in *The Ecologist*, Vol. 18, Nos. 4/5 (1988). Reprinted in *Society and Nature*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1992), p. 112.
8. Fritjof Capra, *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter* (London: Flamingo, 1997), p. 7. In *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture* (1982) Capra also stated his support for deep ecology.
9. Charlene Spretnak, *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1986), p. 27.
10. Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak, *Green Politics: The Global Promise* (London: Hutchinson, 1984).
11. For Herbert Gruhl, see Janet Biehl, “‘Ecology’ and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-right” in Janet Biehl & Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh & San Francisco: AK Press, 1995). I also highly recommend the writings of Jutta Dittfurth, *Feuer in die Herzen: Gegen die Entwertung des Menschen* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag, 1997) and *Entspannt in die Barbarei. (Öko-)Faschismus und Biozentrismus* (Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag, 1996).

Although there was a public break between the ÖDP and Gruhl, this did not have much influence on the former's ideology. In fact they continued to spread his books and pamphlets and kept informal relations with their erstwhile leader.

12. For Rudolf Bahro, see Janet Biehl, "'Ecology' and the Modernization of Fascism in the German Ultra-right". See also the exchange between James Hart and Ullrich Melle who defend Rudolf Bahro and Janet Biehl in *Democracy & Nature* #11/12 (Vol. 4, no. 2/3, 1998).

13. See Murray Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit against Anti-Humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism and Primitivism* (London: Cassell, 1995).

14. Dave Foreman interviewed by Bill Devall, "A Spanner in the Woods" in *Simply Living* Vol. 12 (c. 1986). Quoted in Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology* (Montréal: Black Rose, second revised edition, 1995), p. 117. In 1989 there was a public debate in New York between Dave Foreman and Murray Bookchin about their differences. Foreman distanced himself from his statements in the interview he gave to Bill Devall in this debate, but soon thereafter he started using the same eco-brutalist language again. This is hardly surprising because it is inherent in 'biocentric' thinking. After leaving *Earth First!*, Foreman joined the board of directors of the conservationist organization *Sierra Club* and tried, fortunately unsuccessfully so far, to have it adopt an anti-immigration policy. The debate was published in Steve Chase (ed.), *Defending the Earth: A Dialogue between Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).

15. Dave Foreman, "A Modest Proposal for a Wilderness Preserve System" in *Whole Earth Review* #53 (Winter 1986). Quoted by Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends: Practicing Deep Ecology* (Layton: Gibbs Smith, 1988), pp. 164-165.

16. Bill Devall, *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends*, p. 49.

17. *ibid.*, p. 149.

18. For his intellectual development see the detailed analysis of Pierre-André Taguieff in *Sur la Nouvelle Droite* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994). Unfortunately Taguieff takes the proclamations of De Benoist about his politics being neither Left nor Right far too serious.
19. In *Krisis* #15 De Benoist published “La nature et sa valeur intrinsèque” (September 1993). Under the pseudonym Robert de Herte he wrote in *Elements* #79 “Les deux écologies”, “Herbert Gruhl et les 'verts' allemands” and “Écologie et religion” (January 1994).
20. Mark Wegierski, “The European New Right” in *Telos* #98/99 (Winter 1993/Fall 1994). *Telos*, once a leading neo-marxist theoretical journal in the United States, has unfortunately been transformed into a platform for European *Nouvelle Droite* authors.
21. The Ecologist, *A Blueprint for Survival* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 102. For a critique of its conservatism see David Pepper, *The Roots of Modern Environmentalism* (London & New York: Routledge, 1984).
22. Edward Goldsmith interviewed by Paul Gimeno in *Oikos* #3. *Oikos* is a publication of the Belgian (Flemish) green party *Agalev*. My translation from the Dutch. For a critique of the reactionary ecofeminism of Vandana Shiva, see the excellent essay by Maria Wölflingseder, “Kosmischer Größenwahnsinn. Biologistische und rassistische Tendenzen im New Age und im spirituellen Ökofeminismus” in Gerhard Kern & Lee Taynor (eds.), *Die esoterische Verführung: Angriffe auf Vernunft und Freiheit* (Aschaffenburg: Alibri Verlag, 1995), pp. 187-210. See also from the same author “Fetisch Weiblichkeit: Über die diffizilen Zusammenhänge zwischen spirituellen Ökofeminismus und rechter Ideologie” in: Renate Bitzan (ed.), *Rechte Frauen: Skingirls, Walküren und feine Damen* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1997), pp. 56-71. For a critique of American ecofeminism see Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1991).
23. Edward Goldsmith, *The Way: An Ecological World-View* (Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998). Revised and enlarged edition, p. 424.
24. Edward Goldsmith, idem p. 437-438.
25. Edward Goldsmith, idem p. xvii.

26. Nicholas Hildyard, *'Blood' and 'Culture': Ethnic Conflict and the Authoritarian Right* (London: Cornerhouse briefing #11, January 1999).
27. Edward Goldsmith, "Basic Principles of Cultural Ecology" in *The Ecologist*, Vol. 1, no. 12, 1971, p. 4. Quoted by Nicholas Hildyard, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
28. Edward Goldsmith, *The Way*, p. 420.
29. Guy de Martelaere, "Nieuws en korte beschouwingen" in *Gwenved* #23 (January 1998). Guy de Martelaere also publishes in the British right wing periodicals *Perspectives: European identities, autonomies and initiatives*, edited by the Transeuropa Collective, and *Alternative Green*, a magazine edited by Richard Hunt. My translation from the Dutch. In 1997 Tekos (no. 85) published a translation of the first editorial Goldsmith wrote in 1970 for *The Ecologist*. It also published a translation of "Scientific superstitions" (from *The Ecologist*, vol. 27, no. 5, Sept/Oct. 1997). Guy de Martelaere translated parts of *The Way* to Dutch for the publishing house of Tekos. Goldsmith also gave an interview to the right wing Belgian periodical *De Vrijbouter* (Spring 1998) in which he praised the traditional family and traditional community.
30. Laurent Ozon, "L'habitat, un enjeu pour les écologistes" in *Le recours aux forêts* #4. My translation from the French. Ozon's articles are translated and published in Italian in *Diorama Letteraria*, and in Dutch in the extreme right wing paper of Voorpost, SOS-Nieuwsbrief.
31. Quoted by Philippe Pelletier, *L'imposture écologiste* (Paris: Reclus, 1993), pp. 101-102. My translation from the French. See also Thierry Maricourt, *Les nouvelles passarelles de l'extrême droite* (Paris: Syllepse, 1997).
32. "Ni droite, ni gauche. Entretien avec Antoine Waechter" in *Krisis* #15 (September 1993), pp. 16-23. My translation from the French. In the same issue was published "Eight Theses on Deep Ecology" by Arne Næss.
33. Interview with Antoine Waechter in *Alsace Presse*, 8 December 1998. My translation from the French.
34. Antoine Waechter, *Libération*, 15 February 1999. My translation from the French.

35. Interview with Edward Goldsmith in *Le recours aux forêts* #3. My translation from the French.
36. Christiane Chombeau, "Le dérive extrémiste d'Antoine Waechter" in *Le Monde*, 18 February 1999. Nicole Gauthier, "Waechter accusé par les siens de dérive brune" *Libération*, 12 February 1999.
37. Letter of Edward Goldsmith in *Silence* #248 (September 1999). Emphasis added. My translation from the French. Arne Næss seems to share this purist, 'nativist' view: "The quite young Dalai Lama was exalted by cameras and films that were 'smuggled' to him ... When such a central personality, raised from the cradle in a strong culture, tumbles headlong for something so specifically Western technology as a camera, what chances does the culture have to survive? The enthusiasm of the Dalai Lama maybe reveals the demonic force of modern industrial technology." Arne Næss, *Økologi, samfunn og livsstil* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 5th edition 1976) pp. 111-112. Translation from the Norwegian by Eirik Eiglad.
38. Alain de Benoist interviewed in the British right wing magazine *Right Now! A Magazine of Politics, Ideas, and Culture*, 1997.
39. Heinz-Siegfried Strelow in *Junge Freiheit* #47 (1996), quoted by Jean Cremet, "Neue Rechte: jetzt generationen- übergreifend" in *AK* 403, 5 June 1997. The UÖD split away from the *Ökologisch-Demokratische Partei* (Ecological Democratic Party). The MEI is affiliated with the latter. Reports of Hannes Krill in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 26 and 29 January 2000 indicate that the split between *Die Grünen* and the ÖDP could be restored in the near future. *Die Grünen* have got rid of their left wing that temporarily blocked the influence of the ecofascists.
40. Edward Goldsmith, "Il tao dell'ecologia" in *Diorama Letteraria* #214 (May 1998).
41. Marco Tarchi, "Cari liberali, adesso è vostro il pensiero unico" in *Liberal* #26 (May 1997). Tarchi also contributed to the American journal *Telos*, see "In Search of Right and Left" in *Telos* #103 (Spring 1995). Like De Benoist Tarchi is critical of *Alleanza Nazionale* (the former *Movimento Sociale Italiano*), but that does not mean he is not right wing, he is merely from a rival tendency on the Right.

42. Michael Walker, “A Darker Shade of Green” in *The Scorpion* #19. This British magazine is very close to GRECE. Michael Walker is also a collaborator of *Elemente*, the magazine of the German branch of the *Nouvelle Droite*.

43. Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, “Introduction” in *Ecofascism*, pp. 2-3.

44. Murray Bookchin, *The Philosophy of Social Ecology*, pp. 101-102. Emphasis added.